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AUTHOR Rotundo, Bernard
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ABSTRACT

Project Priority: Occupational Emphasis was designed to assist New York State two-year colleges in the application of cognitive style information to vocational programs. The project consisted of four phases: (1) a workshop on cognitive style assessment, case studies, and information application; (2) campus visitations by project consultants in support of cognitive style projects at each participating campus; (3) obtaining and generalizing results from the local applications; and (4) development and dissemination of materials to assist in the implementation of cognitive style information in other community colleges. As a result of the project, cognitive style information was established as an important asset to occupational instruction and counseling procedures at the participating institutions. (JDS).

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TWO-YEAR COLLEGE DEVELOPMENT CENTER
State University of New York at Albany

# Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis
1975 - 1976
A VEA Funded Project

## Final Report

Prepared by:
Bernard Rotundo
Assistant to Project Director

JC 770 199

# Project Priority
## Abstract

In July of 1974 the Two-Year College Development Center began a project to provide cognitive style information to faculty, counselors and administrators in two year colleges in New York. The primary objective of that project was to explore the applicability of such information to two year college programming. At the completion of the project many participants felt that this information had a great deal of relevance for their student population and wished to continue the work they had begun. For 1975-76 project staff designed a grant proposal for VEA funding which would involve other college personnel and assist college teams in applying this information to vocational programs on their campuses. Although funding was not available until the second semester, eleven of the original twenty-one colleges were able to continue with the project. The objectives for Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis were:

1. To strengthen cognitive style knowledge and application information of participants.

2. To focus the application of cognitive style information to specific occupational instruction and counseling needs of participating colleges.

3. To summarize current information on cognitive style application procedures as related to occupational counseling and instructional programs in the community college.

4. To develop and disseminate materials which will assist in the implementation of cognitive style information in the community college.

Working with the project staff on the 1976 project were team leaders and members from the first year of the project serving as consultants for college teams. These Campus consultants with the project staff identified four questions regarding the application of cognitive style information which they felt were crucial to the two-year college.

1. Does a program in cognitive style information for students improve learning performance?

2. Is there a relationship between students' cognitive styles and their performance on written assignments?

3. Is there an inverse relationship between mismatching of cognitive style and performance in occupational curriculums?

4. Is cognitive style a determinant in the type of materials students select in a learning laboratory?

The first activity of the project, the workshop, was designed to focus on these questions through the presentation of case studies in these four areas. The case studies were designed by the campus consultants and with necessary modifications could be used in a variety of program areas. Workshop participants were encouraged to adopt one of the cases for their campus or to develop one of their own. Assistance in implementing a "case" will be provided to each college during the consultant visitation phase of the project. The results of all case studies were reported to the Center so that all available information could be summarized and made available to all participating colleges.

The final activity of the project was a three day Summary Activity, designed to share information, conclusions and recommendations regarding the use of cognitive style information in the two-year college. Following this activity reports were prepared and distributed to participating colleges to assist them in their continued work with cognitive style.

## Project Staff

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| Project Director ..... | Kathryn J. Martens, Two-Year College Development Center |
| Assistant to Project Director .. | Bernard Rotundo, Two-Year College Development Center |
| Project Consultant ..... | Dennis Nielsen, Department of Curriculum & Instruction<br>State University of New York at Albany |
| Evaluator ..... | Ronald J. Madsen, Department of Curriculum & Instruction<br>State University of New York at Albany |
| Workshop Consultants ..... | Carol Ann Moore, Educational Testing Service<br>Princeton, New Jersey |
| ..... | Karen Nelson, University of California, Irvine |
| Summary Activity | |
| Consultants ..... | K. Patricia Cross, University of Nebraska, Lincoln |
| ..... | Connie Sutton, Miami-Dade Community College<br>Miami, Florida |
| Advisors ..... | Francis P. Hodge, Institute of Man and Science |
| ..... | Karen Nelson, University of California, Irvine |
| Campus Consultants ..... | Ronald Hileman, Professor of Accounting<br>Cobleskill Agricultural and Technical College |
| | Bruce Hilyard, Chairman of Intermediate Studies<br>Genesee Community College |
| | Nancy A. Hoddick, Bureau of Two-Year College Programs<br>State Education Department |
| | Peter Idleman, Dean of Academic Affairs,<br>Maria College |
| | Charles Merrill, Professor of Biology<br>Cobleskill Agricultural and Technical College |
| | Sankar Sastri, Professor of Engineering Technology<br>New York City Community College |
| | Edward Stodola, Director of Counseling<br>North Country Community College |
| | Herbert Zagarow, Director of Psychological Services<br>Suffolk County Community College |

## Background Information

The Two-Year College Development Center, concerned with faculty interest in better serving the diverse student population of the community college, and believing that information on how individual differences in information processing might effect student learning would be valuable to these faculty, proposed to the New York State Education Department, a project which would bring cognitive style information to two-year colleges and Educational Opportunity Centers in New York State. The first year of the project, funded under Title III, began in July 1974. Twenty-one two-year colleges, public and private, including community colleges, Agricultural and Technical Colleges and Educational Opportunity Centers participated in the project, as did the staff team from the Chancellor's office of the Virginia Community College System. The objective of the first year of the project was to provide cognitive style information and to evaluate the applicability of that information for two-year colleges.

As a result of the Center program for 1974-75 teams and team leaders were selected by the participating colleges and EOC's. A series of introductory workshops in cognitive style and its implication were held. Programs of applicability and projects were planned and developed.

One of the participating colleges, Sullivan County Community College, for example undertook a project to assess the cognitive styles of students in four different vocational programs. The curriculums studied were: engineering technologies, hotel administration, social services programs and commerical art. The team hypothesized that because of the highly diverse nature of these programs a particular cognitive style would predominate. For example, an artist might demonstrate an intuitive style as compared to an engineer who must follow specific blueprints and would probably therefore have a more systematic

style. At Trocaire College in Buffalo two groups of students from the Health Sciences curriculum were examined in terms of their cognitive styles. Students who were succeeding in Physiology and Anatomy were cognitively mapped and compared with an equal number of students experiencing difficulty. The knowledge gained in both of these situations would have been extremely beneficial had it been available before the student selected his curriculum. Two more obvious uses of the information were: (1) explore other possible occupational choices with the student to prevent the loss of time through failure; (2) inform the faculties in these curriculums about varied ways of offering their instruction to accommodate these individual differences.

The Center felt that strong participant interest in the project indicated that cognitive style information offers potential implications for the improvement of educational practices. Participating colleges indicated strong interest in continuing their work with cognitive style. These considerations led to the development of a second proposal focused on the implications of cognitive style for occupational programs in two-year colleges.

The project which was planned for the 1975-76 academic year was titled "Strengthening Two-Year College Occupational and Instructional Programs Through the use of Cognitive Style Information". This project was designed to provide two-year colleges and Educational Opportunity Centers with viable alternatives in assessing student learning strengths through knowledge of cognitive style information and applicability of this information.

Although originally designed as a one-year project, delayed funding approval necessitated a re-design of the original project objectives and activities. The objectives for the revised project (Project Priority: Occupational Emphasis) were:

1. To strengthen cognitive style knowledge and application information of participants through:
   1.1 Providing updated information on current assessment information
   1.2 Providing specific suggestions for the application of cognitive style information.
2. To focus the application of cognitive style information to specific occupational instruction and counseling needs of participating colleges through:
   2.1 Assisting campus teams in modifying application suggestions for use on their own campuses
   2.2 Campus visitations by consultants to support work of each campus team as specifically designed by each team.
3. To summarize current information on cognitive style application procedures as related to occupational counseling and instructional programs in the community college through:
   3.1 Obtaining and generalizing results from campus applications
   3.2 Suggesting procedures for continual implementation on each campus
   3.3 Relating cognitive style to other vocational, instructional and counseling innovations.
4. To develop and disseminate materials which will assist in the implementation of cognitive style information in the community college.

Funding for the project was not available until the second semester of 1976. Of the original twenty-one participating colleges and Educational Opportunity Center's, fourteen returned commitment forms, three of this fourteen for a variety of reasons, were unable to participate. The participating colleges were:

Bronx Community College
Buffalo Educational Opportunity Center
Cobleskill Agricultural and Technical College
Genesee Community College
Maria College
Monroe Community College
New York City Community College
North Country Community College
Staten Island Community College
Suffolk County Community College
Ulster County Community College

## Design

The design of the project was that each of the four objectives would involve a phase of the project. Phase I would be a workshop that would provide updated information on current assessment information. The workshop would also provide specific suggestions for the application of cognitive style information.

Phase II would assist campus teams in modifying application suggestions for use on their own campuses. Campus visitations would be provided by various consultants to support work on each campus as specifically designed by each team. Phase III was concerned with obtaining and generalizing results from campus applications. A Summary Activity was planned for continual implementation of cognitive style as well as relating cognitive style to other vocational, instructional and counseling innovations. The final phase of Project Priority: Occupational Emphasis developed and disseminated materials which will assist in the implementation of cognitive style information in the community college.

The project staff invited team leaders and other individuals who had continued their involvement with cognitive style from the previous year to become consultants to Project Priority: Occupational Emphasis. These individuals were chosen from a diverse group and represented a cross-section of interests and expertise. The campus consultants met with project staff to discuss and identify crucial issues concerning cognitive style information and how it relates to occupational and developmental students in the community college.

In February of 1976 the consultants to the projects and project staff developed over thirty critical questions concerning cognitive styles and occupational students. It was decided that four issues were crucial in the relating of cognitive style to the two-year college occupational program. These

questions were:

1. Does a program in cognitive style information for students improve learning performance?
2. Is there a relationship between students cognitive styles and their performance in written assignments.
3. Is there an inverse relationship between mismatching of cognitive style and performance in occupational curriculums.
4. Is cognitive style a determinent in the type of materials students select in a learning laboratory.

With these critical questions in mind project staff with the assistance of the campus consultants designed a three-day workshop to be held in March of 1976. The workshop focused on the questions developed by staff and project consultants. The project consultants presented case studies developed on their own campuses for other participating colleges to adopt or modify for use on their campuses. The Center staff developed four main objectives for the workshop.

1. After a review of cognitive style information the participants would be able to define those cognitive styles they will be working with on their campuses.
2. After receiving current information on cognitive style assessment information, participants would be able to:
   - 2.1 Select cognitive style assessment instruments which measure those cognitive styles they will be working with on their campuses,
   - 2.2 Administer assessment instruments which measure those cognitive styles they will be working with on their campuses,
   - 2.3 Score assessment instruments which measure those cognitive styles they will be working with on their campuses, and
   - 2.4 Interpret assessment instruments which measure those cognitive styles they will be working with on their campuses.
3. Participants will demonstrate understanding of application information. Presented at the workshop will include:
   - 3.1 Discussion of that information
   - 3.2 Written reactions to that information to include the evaluation of selected specific suggestions.

4. Participants will modify applications, suggestions for their own campuses by:
   - 4.1 Relating those suggestions to their campus situations
   - 4.2 Developing specific procedures which they plan to use on their campuses.

An ultimate goal of the project was for participating two-year colleges, to begin projects on their own campuses exploring the uses of cognitive style. The workshop objectives provided for the participants an opportunity to pinpoint the aspects of cognitive style that most clearly related to the project needs of the individual campuses. In the form of review sessions participants were given the opportunity to identify and define the various dimensions of cognitive style.

One important concern for many of the project participants was the methods of assessment of cognitive style. To meet this concern the workshop provided for the participants a session on tests and testing procedures used in the assessment of cognitive styles. Sample tests were administered and information on scoring and interpreting was presented. The advisors for this aspect of the project were Carol Ann Moore of the Educational Testing Service and Karen Nelson of the University of California at Irvine.

To better aid the participating colleges in selecting the type of project they would carry out on their own campuses, the workshop provided the participants sample case studies as developed by the project consultants. The case studies generally centered around one of the four research questions selected by the project staff and the project consultants. Through presentations and discussion the participants could select the direction and emphasis of their own campus project.

The project staff conducted a case study at the workshop to demonstrate one application of cognitive style information. The case study hypothesis was that community college faculty who have the same learning style as the presenters

at the various sessions of the workshop, would rate the compatability of their learning style with the instructional method used, significantly higher than community college faculty who were mismatched according to learning styles and instructional methods. The design of the case study was that the participants were cognitively mapped according to results obtained from earlier testing of participants. Through the use of a questionnaire the participants would rate each activity of the workshop according to their preference of learning style. The results demonstrated significantly that community college faculties would rate activities higher if they were compatible with their own particular cognitive style. For example if a person was mapped to be highly intuitive and had attended a lecture session of the workshop they would rate the activity lower than they would a small group discussion session. The reason being that intuitive people generally prefer small group interactions rather than lecture type of presentations. The results were very encouraging in the fact that a clear concise applicability of cognitive style was demonstrated.

The participants left the workshop with project ideas, sample tests, cognitive style information and the support of Center staff and project consultants. Armed with these tools the participants were ready to begin work on their individual campus projects.

As part of the project development phase, the participants were assured support from the project staff and the project consultants. To assist the campuses in developing their projects on their campuses, campus visitations were arranged. The project consultants would act as campus consultants to the participating campuses. After a consultation visit was completed, the consultant would report back to project staff informing project staff of progress to date. For example, Nancy Hoddick, campus consultant, was requested by the Buffalo Educational Opportunity Center to visit their campus and aid in the development of a research project with developmental students. While Dr. Hoddick was at the Buffalo

Educational Opportunity Center she also conducted a seminar on cognitive style information for other interested faculty members. Dr. Hoddick also conducted a similar seminar at Ulster County Community College. Herb Zagarow of Suffolk County Community College, acting as a campus consultant visited the campus of Genesee Community College to aid in the development of a project working with writing styles of occupational students. Dr. Zagarow had designed a similar project on his own campus at Suffolk County Community College. Dennis Nielson, a project staff member, acted as a campus consultant and visited the campus of Cobleskill Agricultural and Technical College, to aid in the statistical analysis of the research data compiled by Ronald Hileman, Charles Merrill and Morgan Desmond. Ron Hileman, professor in the Accounting Department conducted a project with business majors. Charles Merrill professor in the biology department conducted a project with occupational students in a learning laboratory setting to determine if cognitive style is a determinate in the mode of instruction selected by an occupational students. Morgan Desmond, professor of English conducted a project with freshman occupational students.

While these visitations had specifically been requested by participants the first year of the project, there was some difficulty in arranging them because of the shortened time of the project. Campuses were rushed to complete their projects by the June 1st deadline. These time constraints made scheduling of the visitations extremely difficult. It is hoped that during the summer or early fall more campuses would take advantage of the opportunity to have a consultant visit their campus. In fact the campus consultant phase of Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis was extended from the original final date of June 1st to September 31st. Some of the participants had expressed an interest in either continuing projects through the summer or beginning projects in the fall. The project staff felt these needs should be met so they arranged for the time period to be extended.

Phase III of Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis consisted of a final activity, a three day Summary Workshop. This activity, held during the final days of June 1976, was designed to share information, conclusions and recommendations regarding the use of cognitive style information in the two-year college.

The staff of the project developed four main objectives for the Summary Workshop:

1) In order to summarize current information on the application of cognitive style information to occupational counseling and instructional programs, participants will

   1.1 Provide test results and procedural information on their work to the Two-Year College Development Center

   1.2 Report on their use of cognitive style information with occupational students

   1.3 Summarize the implications of the campus reports by areas of concern

2) In order to continue implementation on college campuses which includes staff development activities, the participants will interpret a knowledge of change within a Two-Year College by

   2.1 Receive information on organizational development and apply it to the fostering of change for increased cognitive style use

   2.2 Consider use of organization development information in their present plans for continuing cognitive style innovations on their campuses

3) To relate current information on cognitive style application procedures to other vocational, instructional and counseling innovations participants will:

   3.1 Use information provided from other participating two-year colleges in the different projects in which they are involved to either develop or modify their future plans

   3.2 Apply the suggestions from project consultants to future planning

4) In order to develop and disseminate materials which will assist in the implementating of cognitive style information in the community college participants will make suggestions for materials to be developed during phase IV.

The project staff was interested in obtaining as much information as possible about the application of cognitive style information to the community college. To accomplish the first objective of the workshop the staff compiled the results of the work that was done on the various campuses involved in the project. All participants were then provided with more specific and generalizable information for application.

Since much of the Summary Activity was based on information sent by the participants the staff asked the participants for essentially three things to be received before the workshop.

1. A two or three page summary on what they did. Enclosed in the mailings to the participants was a sample outline of the summary.

2. Test data. The staff requested all raw scores for the tests given, in the format they were used. Information requested included any descriptive data (i.e. classes used, major, sex, etc.) Scores were sent in list, computer printout, and various other means.

3. Procedural information. Information requested concerned the logistical aspects of the campus projects. If persons did an individual project they provided information individually. If a group project was done then information was provided collectively. Using this information a report given by center staff would include information on costs, time spent on projects, materials used etc.

As part of the design of the activities of the Summary Workshop the participants were called upon to present a short presentation on their projects. The presentations were grouped in terms of the research questions in which they were addressed. After presentations were given discussion followed. The consultants for the Summary Workshop provided reactions into aspects of organizational and staff development techniques. Acting as consultants for the Summary Activity for Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis were K. Patricia Cross, University of Nebraska, Karen Nelson, University of California at Irvine and Connie Sutton, Miami-Dade Community College.

The presentations provided participants with an opportunity to share information with their colleagues in community college education. Sessions were available for small group discussion as well as the large group presentations.

With the development of cognitive style application techniques the project staff felt that, as with any new and innovative idea, a certain skill in organizational change and development was necessary. The second objective of Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis addressed their concern.

Connie Sutton, project consultant from Miami-Dade Community College, addressed the group on "Implementing Innovative Ideas in the Community College". In her address she gave information on organizational development and the application of it in fostering change in the community college. Small group discussion led by Staff members complimented Connie Sutton's presentation and provided participants with an opportunity for an exchange of ideas and a direction of change on their individual campuses.

K. Patricia Cross' address on "Relating Cognitive Style to Other Instructional Innovations" provided participants with suggestions on future planning. Discussion followed on relating current information on cognitive style application procedures to other vocational, instructional and counseling innovations.

The last objective of the Summary Workshop of Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis was to have the participants assist the staff in development of Phase IV of the total project. In the fourth phase of Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis materials would be developed and disseminated to the participants during the Summer of 1976.

The focus of much of the materials would be on developing instructional alternatives in the community college as well or assisting students in the selection of appropriate alternatives. Discussion developed ideas for a National Project with three cooperating Agencies. One would be the Two-Year College Development Center, a second would be the Educational Testing Service, and the third would be the League for Innovation in the Community College, a consortium of community colleges throughout the country interested in expanding the role and dimension of the community

college in the world of higher education. This national project would be a three component system; consisting of research, staff development and information dissemination. The information disseminated to the participants would be available to other interested colleges.

In essence this information dissemination is the fourth Phase of Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis. Project staff has gathered together all the information that has been developed by the participating colleges. This information will be sorted, catalogued and put together in a packet form for all interested parties. These materials will be prepared to assist the participating colleges and others who may be interested in their continued work with cognitive style.

## Evaluation

The following section is a Summary of the Evaluation reports prepared by the project evaluator. After each project activity the participants were asked to complete a evaluation questionnaire. These evaluations were helpful in meeting the needs of community college faculty by informing project staff of the strengths and weaknesses of the project.

Based on the evaluation of the objectives and activities of Project Priority: Occupational Emphasis several areas of consideration seem to stand out. First, initiating research through project participants should be expected to be initially a learning experience for all involved. The staff of a project should expect exploratory and general results rather than formal, specific, and uniform results when various institutions are involved in the project. Secondly, the Project showed implications for further study of cognitive style. A critical issue identified by the participants was the lack of standardized information on cognitive style assessment instruments and assessment procedures.

The Project also established the potential use of cognitive style information

in occupational and instructional counseling. First the participants felt that students reacted more positively to cognitive style information than to traditional apptitude and achievement test scores because there was no value factor associated with the cognitive style scores. It was supportive to the students to know that it is all right to have different cognitive styles, if strategies can be developed to cope with programs, instructors, and/or learning activities which are not compatible with their cognitive styles. Secondly, the participants felt that the questions of match or mis-match with student-instructor cognitive styles may be irrelevant. The reason is that the structure of the course, learning activities, and teaching style of the instructor may be inconsistent with the instructor's cognitive style.

A final implication of the Project findings is the use of cognitive style as a basis for staff development or in-service training of both counselors and faculty. If instructors were aware of cognitive style differences, they could provide various training activities and/or instructional strategies which would facilitate students adapting their cognitive style and/or learning preferences to the content and objectives of the course.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

This section of the project report contains a review of project objectives and their attainment followed by a series of project staff recommendations.

In order to meet the first objective of the project which was to strengthen cognitive style knowledge and application information, the project staff designed a workshop to review cognitive style information and provide specific suggestions for the application of cognitive style information. It is now evident to the project staff that the first objective was met. The participants have demonstrated a knowledge and awareness of the conceptual nature of cognitive style information. In order to demonstrate their mastery of the conceptual nature of cognitive style

the participants designed and carried out varied projects incorporating cognitive style information. Through the use of these projects much information was gained on the applicability of cognitive style information to community college campuses.

The project staff provided for the participants vehicles of support in the design of the projects. As a function of the second objective which was to focus the application of cognitive style information to specific occupational instruction and counseling needs of the participating colleges, the project staff aided the campuses in establishing their projects. Through the use of suggestions and sample case studies the participants were better able to adapt a research question to their particular campus. Besides assistance and information, the participants were provided with campus visitations from campus consultants. These campus consultants assisted the college team in the planning and carrying out of their projects on some aspect of cognitive style information relating to occupational counseling or instructional programs. Time constraints limited the amount of campus visitations that actually took place. The visitations that did take place were reported to be productive and informative.

The most important aspect of Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis centered around the third objective of the project. The third objective concerned itself with summarizing the current information on cognitive style application procedures as well as obtaining results from campus applications. Objective three would also suggest procedures for continual implementation of cognitive styles on each campus and relate cognitive style to other vocational, instructional and counseling innovations. Through the form of a summary activity much information was shared and produced. Participants provided for project staff and their fellow participants information on their projects and the results of their research. The reports were given in presentation form as well as a formal written report (attached). A critical need that evolved out of the summary activity was the need for development

of a standard battery of assessment instruments.

Another aim of Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis was to compile results of various projects on participating campuses and formulate norms for a community college population. Since the projects dealt with a diversified series of research questions, the formulation of norms became increasingly difficult as more and more information was received. Future research should include a less broad based outlook and zero in on two or three research hypotheses.

A critical development in aiding the success of the project was the formulation of the campus team approach. Through strong leadership on individual campuses, the teams functioned strongly and productively. A team approach provided members with support for their work and opportunity for sharing of ideas and problems that inevitably would occur. A strong recommendation for future work is the maintenance of the campus team approach.

After the completion of work by campus teams, campus consultants, project staff and project consultants Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis came to a close. It was a project of tremendous coordination and cooperation. At the end cognitive style information was established as an important asset to the occupational instruction and counseling procedures of the participating community colleges. Future directions as seen by project staff centered around the development of a national project involving the participating colleges with community colleges around the country. Such a project would provide colleges participating in Project Priority:Occupational Emphasis with the opportunity to share their learnings for the improvement of occupational instruction and counseling with others and would provide support and coordination for the continuing research that is needed.

The project staff feels that the strong participant interest in the project indicates that cognitive style information offers important potential for the improvement of occupational education practices. The participating colleges have indicated strong interest in continuing their work with cognitive style. It is

the expectation of project staff and participants that future work will be carried out in the study of cognitive styles.

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